

Measles: Frequently Asked Questions

What is measles?

- Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus.
- Measles causes a fever (often high), cough, runny nose, and red eyes. It then causes a rash of tiny red spots that starts at the head and spreads to the rest of the body.
- Babies, children under 5, and adults over 20 are at higher risk of complications from measles.
- Measles can cause health complications in up to 30% of cases.
- Common measles complications include ear infections and diarrhea.
- Serious complications from measles can include pneumonia and encephalitis, which can lead to long-term deafness or brain damage. For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die.
- Measles may cause pregnant woman to give birth prematurely, or have a low-birth-weight baby.

How does measles spread?

- Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can live for up to two hours on a surface or in the air, so someone can catch measles even after an infected person has left a room.
- Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before to four days after they get a rash.
- Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected.

How common is measles in the United States?

- From January 1 to February 20, 2015, 154 people from 17 states and Washington, D.C., were reported to have measles. Most of these cases are part of an outbreak linked to an amusement park in California.
- The majority of the people who got measles were unvaccinated.
- Measles is still common in some countries in Europe, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa.
- Travelers with measles continue to bring the disease into the United States.
- Measles can spread in the United States when it reaches groups of unvaccinated people.

Measles in Maryland

- As of February 20, 2015, there has not been a confirmed case of measles in Maryland since 2013.
- Maryland has high vaccination rates. The 2013 Annual School Immunization Survey showed that an estimated 98% of kindergarteners had two doses of the MMR vaccine.

How can I protect my child against measles?

- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all recommend that children receive two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR):
 - The first dose at 12 months through 15 months of age
 - The second dose at 4 years through 6 years of age
- Children can get the second dose at any age, as long as it is at least 28 days after the first dose.
- Before any international travel, infants 6 to 11 months of age should have at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Children 12 months of age or older should have two doses separated by at least 28 days. It takes several weeks for the body to develop immunity to measles.

Does the MMR vaccine have side effects?

- Most children do not have any side effects from the shot.
- Side effects are usually very mild, such as a fever or rash.
- More serious side effects are rare. These may include a short seizure related to fever, which experts say have no long-term effects.

Does the MMR vaccine cause autism?

- Concerns about vaccine safety came from a 1998 study that falsely suggested a link between the MMR vaccine and autism. The study was found to be wrong and was retracted in 2010.
- Several dozen studies and a report from the Institute of Medicine have since found no link between autism and any vaccines, including the MMR vaccine.

Can people with the MMR vaccine still get the measles?

- About 3 out of 100 people who get two doses of measles vaccine will still get measles if exposed to the virus. But they are much more likely to have a milder illness, and they are also less likely to spread the disease to other people.

What about people who are not vaccinated?

- Medical and religious exemptions to vaccination are allowed in Maryland. For more information on vaccine requirements and exemptions, visit:
<http://phpa.dhmd.maryland.gov/OIDEOR/IMMUN/SitePages/back-to-school-immunization-requirements.aspx>

As an adult, do I need this vaccine?

You do NOT need the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine (MMR) if:

- You had blood tests that show you are immune to measles, mumps, and rubella.
- You were born before 1957.
- You already had two doses of MMR *or* one dose of MMR plus a second dose of measles vaccine.
- You already had one dose of MMR *and* are not at high risk of measles exposure.

You SHOULD get the measles vaccine if you are not among the categories listed above, and:

- You are a college student, trade school student, or other student beyond high school.
- You work in a hospital or other medical facility.
- You travel internationally, or are a passenger on a cruise ship.
- You are a woman of childbearing age.

How do I know if I am immune to measles?

- First, try to find your vaccination records or documentation of measles immunity.
- If you do not have your vaccination records, talk to your doctor. It is safe to get another dose of MMR vaccine even if you are already immune to measles (or mumps or rubella).
- You can also ask your doctor to test your blood to determine whether you're immune, but this option is likely to cost more and may take two doctor's visits.

If you think you or your child might have the measles, call ahead before going to the doctor's office, urgent care, or hospital, because measles is so contagious.

For more information: www.cdc.gov/measles/ ~ Carroll County Health Department, February 24, 2015.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.